

Memories of John F. Kennedy

Nothing is quite so memorable about John Kennedy as his normality.

When he saw a pretty girl, he surveyed her expertly and sometimes invoked presidential political privilege and shook hands, lingering a moment or two for closer inspection. "I never cared much for El Morocco and nightclub life," he said about his salad days. "Just give me a beach and a girl any time." After he had called the big steel executives s.o.b.s in 1962, he was asked how come he had violated his own rule against indulgence in anger. "Because it felt so good," he said, grinning.

Out at Lassen Volcanic National Park in California, he became fascinated with the deer that came to his cabin for a handout. He kept calling for more food to feed them in this rare wilderness excursion. The next morning his eggs came without toast. "You fed all the bread to the deer," the chagrined President was told. One morning Dean Rusk got an angry phone call from Kennedy complaining about a news leak. Find the culprit, barked Kennedy. Rusk went to unusual lengths to trace the leak, finally called in the reporter himself for a grilling. The Secretary of State got the answer. Rusk called J.F.K. back. "I've found the leak," he told Kennedy. "It's you. Yesterday in your office at 4 p.m." Kennedy changed the subject.

When the brothers J.F.K. and R.F.K. were noted among the better-dressed males of the nation, John Kennedy complained with a great smile, "I understand how I made it. I'm pretty well dressed. But Bobby isn't." But when the story was printed that he had posed in a new suit like a mannequin for the cover of the fashion magazine *Gentlemen's Quarterly* (he had posed unaware the picture was for that magazine), Kennedy blew his stack. "People are remembered in this world for one thing," he raged, stalking up and down in front of his desk. "Arthur Godfrey is remembered because he buzzed the tower [at Teterboro, N.J., in 1954, in his DC-3]. I'll be remembered now as the man who posed for *Gentlemen's Quarterly*."

After the Inauguration, when it was reported to him that Clare Boothe Luce had been smitten by Teddy Kennedy and had said to friends that Teddy "looked like a Greek god," the President said with a delightfully wicked grin: "Are you sure she didn't say he looked like a goddam Greek?"

And when a piece came out saying that Attorney General Robert Kennedy was the second most powerful man in the world, the President picked up his phone in the presence of a visitor, listened a few seconds, then turned from the receiver to announce: "This is the

second most powerful man in the world on the line." Turning back, Kennedy listened again, then started to laugh. "Bobby wants to know who is No. 1."

In the midst of high affairs of state, Military Aide Chester V. (Ted) Clifton used to get a special signal. He knew what to do. He squared his shoulders, marched out of the room, returned with an important-looking folder, put it discreetly in the President's hand. Inside was a cigar.

Even when he was overweight, Kennedy insisted upon a second bowl of fish chowder for no better reason than that he couldn't resist it. At Salt Lake City onstage in front of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, he was so awed by *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* that he turned his back on his audience so he could see the choir. He stayed that way until the last strain.

When he thought he would like to get back to golf and sew up the sports vote, he had Photographer Cecil Stoughton take some pictures of his swing. He had the idea that he would ship the film off to Arnold Palmer for a professional critique that would turn him into a low handicapper. Like most other golfers, he never got Arnie's counsel and never got the low handicap.

When Kennedy met Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna in 1961, he spent almost as much time looking at the man and wondering about him in a personal way as he did listening to what the Russian was saying. He studied his heavy suit, the strange lapels, Khrushchev's hands and eyes, how he moved and how his sentences spurted out. A man of animal force, Kennedy concluded. The less powerful got his attention too. Down at the ranch of Oklahoma's Senator Bob Kerr, Kennedy kept ignoring Kerr's prize bulls on display and asking about the cowboys who herded them in front of him. "How much do cowboys make a week? Where do they live? How come they get free electricity and free milk?"

As an author, he had some sound advice for new writers. "Don't send out many free books. Tell your friends that if they really are friends they will buy the book." Once when he was driving down New York's Fifth Avenue, he leaned forward on his seat as he passed St. Patrick's Cathedral. He gave a little wave and a salute and with a chuckle said, "Thanks for everything."

Kennedy came off his plane at Newport, R.I., one bright day in the middle of his presidency. He stood in the wind as the Navy band played *Hail to the Chief*. Walking by a group of reporters, he said, "Don't you love the beat of that piece?" He strode off laughing, pleased with himself and his job.



SURVEYING 1959 RICE QUEEN



ENJOYING AN AFTER-DINNER CIGAR



FEEDING A HUNGRY DEER